

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name The Tabernacle/Fireman's Field  
other names/site number VDHR File No. 286-5007

2. Location

street & number 250 South Nursery Avenue not for publication N/A  
city or town Purcellville vicinity N/A  
state Virginia code VA county Loudoun code 107 zip code 20132

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination        request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets        does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant        nationally X statewide        locally. (       See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official Virginia Department of Historic Resources  
State or Federal Agency or Tribal government

Date

In my opinion, the property        meets        does not meet the National Register criteria. (       See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:  
       entered in the National Register  
       See continuation sheet.  
       determined eligible for the National Register  
       See continuation sheet.  
       determined not eligible for the National Register  
       removed from the National Register  
       other (explain):       

Signature of the Keeper       

Date of Action

## 5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

☐ private  
☒ public-local  
☐ public-State  
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

☒ building(s)  
☐ district  
☐ site  
☐ structure  
☐ object

## Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>0</u>	<u>11</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>2</u>	sites
<u>1</u>	<u>5</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>5</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>23</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 4Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.) N/A

## 6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Social: Meeting Hall  
Recreation and Culture: Hall, Auditorium  
Outdoor Recreation  
Sports Facility

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Vacant/Not In Use (awaiting rehabilitation)  
Outdoor Recreation  
Sports Facility

## 7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Other: Vernacular

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE: CONCRETE  
roof ASPHALT: Shingle  
walls WOOD: Weatherboard  
other WOOD; CONCRETE

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria** (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations** (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☒ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or a grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance** (Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

SOCIAL HISTORY

RECREATION

RELIGION

**Period of Significance** 1903-1960

**Significant Dates** 1903; 1939; 1951

**Significant Person** (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) N/A

**Cultural Affiliation** N/A

**Architect/Builder** Arch Simpson (builder)

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS)**

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary Location of Additional Data**

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office  
☐ Other State agency  
☐ Federal agency  
☐ Local government  
☐ University  
☐ Other

Name of repository: Virginia Department of Historic Resources Richmond, Virginia**10. Geographical Data**Acreage of Property Approximately 16 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1			2		3		4				

x See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**name/title Maral S. Kalbian, Architectural Historian; Margaret T. Peters, Historianorganization Maral S. Kalbian, LLC date October 25, 2009street & number P.O. Box 468 telephone 540-955-1231city or town Berryville state VA zip code 22611**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets****Maps** A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs** Representative black and white photographs of the property.**Additional items** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Town of Purcellvillestreet & number 130 E. Main Street telephone 540.338.2304city or town Purcellville state VA zip code 20132

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.). A federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 36 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, 1849 C St., NW, Washington, DC 20240.

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**7. SUMMARY DESCRIPTION:**

Located in the southwestern portion of the town of Purcellville and bounded by South 20<sup>th</sup> Street on the east and South Nursery Avenue on the west, the Bush Meeting Tabernacle sits on an approximately 16-acre parcel of land known as Fireman's Field. The large property, which is included in the Purcellville Historic District, includes a mature oak grove, historically known as Dillon's Woods, and a collection of historic and modern buildings that support two baseball fields.

The largest building is the one-story, Bush Meeting Tabernacle that dates to 1903 and is located at the northern edge of the property with the secondary resources scattered to its south. Constructed by local builder Arch Simpson, the 8,500-square-foot building was originally built to house the "Bush Meetings" that were conducted by the Prohibition and Evangelical Association of Loudoun County, Virginia. Measuring roughly 80 x 160 feet, the distinctive eight-sided, frame building was also used for a variety of community gatherings and recreational activities. In 1939, it was converted into a skating roller rink, a function it has continued to serve until it closed in 2009 awaiting renovation.

**ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS:**

The Bush Meeting Tabernacle, commonly known as the Tabernacle, is a large, one-story meeting hall located in downtown Purcellville between South 20<sup>th</sup> Street and South Nursery Avenue. Since its construction in 1903, it has been in continuous use as a gathering place for the town's social, political, and recreational activities. The wooden building was intended to replace the tents and temporary structures that housed the gatherings on the site since 1878. The Tabernacle is sited on an approximately 16-acre property owned by the Town of Purcellville and known as Fireman's Field. The irregular polygonal-shaped site is fairly flat except at the southwest corner where it slopes down to a small stream. The most notable landscape features are the mature oak, walnut, catalpa, and pine trees that make up the woods east of the Tabernacle. A tall metal chain-link fence runs from the southeast corner of the Tabernacle to South 20<sup>th</sup> Street and continues south along the street down to the southern boundary west to the stream. A low wooden fence is located along the South Nursery Avenue side as is the large graveled parking lot just west of the Tabernacle. Chain link fences also surround the two baseball diamonds.

The primary historic resource on the property is the Tabernacle building, constructed in 1903. The one-story building, which measures roughly 80 x 160 feet, has a distinctive eight-shaped footprint that resembles a rectangle with the corners set at angles. This unconventional shape results in multiple hip ridges running from the main roof ridge to the building's corners. The massive roof is clad in asphalt shingles but was originally covered in standing-seam metal. It features two gable-roofed cupolas that

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were once louvered but have been enclosed. An interior parged concrete-block chimney is located at the southeast corner of the building.

The building's timber-frame walls are clad in German-lap siding that are divided by vertical corner boards about every six feet. Historic photographs indicate that originally sliding wooden doors that could be opened to the outside were located on all sides of the building, except for the east elevation, where the original stage was located. This allowed for maximum air circulation and also permitted attendees of the meeting to sit outside and still be able to see and hear the speakers. These doors have been removed, but variations in the size of the width of the current German-lap siding within these openings versus the original lap siding, confirm their original location.

Presently, the only windows on the building are a series of four, nine-light casement windows along the east side. Each of these features a single batten wood shutter mounted on metal strap hinges. It appears that there were additional windows on this side that have been removed. The main entrance, located at the north end of the building, is fronted by a modern one-story, one-bay, gable-roofed modern portico with square posts. It shields a modern double-leaf metal door. Other similar modern doors are located on the southwest side of the building and allow for access to the present stage.

The random-rubble stone foundation is raised about four feet above the ground level on the eastern wall but is much lower on the other sides. Parts of it have been parged with concrete and other areas of the foundation show evidence of being patched.

When constructed, the Tabernacle building was said to have the capacity for 3,000 people. It was used as a meeting hall until 1939 when it was converted into a roller skating rink. Its present condition represents that most recent use, although significant character-defining elements of its original intent are still intact. The interior is a large open room with a concession-stand counter at the north end, a raised stage at the south end, and several storage rooms and bathrooms along the east wall. The Tabernacle originally had a dirt floor: the present wooden skating rink floor, comprised of narrow-width boards, was added ca. 1939. Historic photographs show that initially the skating rink retained the sliding exterior doors and open-truss framing system of the roof and walls. It was only the 1980s that these exposed structural elements were covered with insulating panels on the ceiling and fiber board, gypsum board, and wood paneling on the interior walls. The interior's exposed posts that support the roof trusses are chamfered and run along the east and west sides of the building, creating outer aisles along those sides. Paneling has been attached to the space between some of the posts creating an enclosed interior skating rink area.

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Recent investigations have confirmed that the original stage was located along the east side of the building. This area now contains two modern restrooms of concrete block construction as well as a room with wooden shelving that holds the skates. The north wall of this skating room features a sliding wooden door that may be similar to those originally located on the exterior of the building.

Modern fluorescent fixtures and fans hang from the flat ceiling. Exposed mechanical equipment and ductwork for heating has also been added to the interior. The small backstage area behind the shallow elevated stage at the south end contains modern electrical equipment.

Although the Tabernacle is located in downtown Purcellville, it still retains its original rural character. The building is easily visible from both South 20<sup>th</sup> Street and South Nursery Avenue and has a large open graveled parking area along its west side. To the east and southeast is a wooded area with remnants of what was known as "Dillon's Woods." This area also contains several resources that date to the mid-1940s. The other resources on Fireman's Field are associated with the large baseball field located to the south and another smaller one to the southwest of the Tabernacle. Multiple noncontributing buildings, structures, and objects that support the function of the baseball fields are also included.

It appears that little, if any, construction took place on the property until the mid- to late 1940s when it was acquired by the local fire company. An open, gable-roofed pavilion supported by large round wooden posts and containing two cinder-block barbeque pits was constructed in the mid-1940s. Located near it toward the south end of the property is a one-story, gable-roofed, open picnic pavilion from the same era. It is three bays wide along the sides and features a large, exterior-end, coursed stone chimney with interior fireplace on the west end, and large, round wooden poles as supports for the roof. Both of these structures are roofed in corrugated metal and are the only other historic elements on the property, with the exception of about half-a-dozen stone barbeque pits located throughout the site that are very small in size. Near these structures is a modern square, frame, open-sided, pyramidal-roofed gazebo constructed of pressure-treated wood.

Fireman's Field contains a large baseball field south of the Tabernacle building and a smaller one to the southwest. Although the dugouts, clubhouse, and bleachers are modern, the large baseball field was originally developed in the 1940s, while the smaller one is modern. Both are surrounded by chain link fencing. The large field, which is noncontributing because of its modern improvements, contains two electrical scoreboards--one on the east and one on the south. A two-story, clubhouse constructed of concrete block on the first floor and frame covered in T-111 on the second floor is located at the south end of the field. The side-gable-roofed building has asphalt shingle roofing, vinyl windows, a pair of fixed pane windows on the north and east sides, and wooden exterior stairs on the south side of the

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building leading to the second-story entrance. Near it is a stepped concrete platform containing multiple flagpoles. At the north end of the field are two sets of modern metal bleachers, two concrete block dugouts, and a large two-story concrete block clubhouse. The modern dugouts, which extend along the infield of the north end of the baseball field, consist of a shed-roofed building with a sunken poured concrete floor, unfinished square wood posts that support the roof, chicken wire mesh across three open sides, and a concrete block rear and side wing wall. The roofs are clad in rolled asphalt roofing. The two sets of modern metal bleachers have open risers that are accessed by wooden stairs on either end. The two-story clubhouse/concession stand on the north end is concrete block on the first floor with T-111 on the second and has an asphalt-single-covered gabled roof. Between the large baseball field and the Tabernacle are six non-contributing sheds of varying sizes and roof shapes. All are one story in height and of frame construction with the exception of one that is constructed of parged, concrete block with the gable ends clad in vertical wood boards. Some of the sheds sit on concrete slabs, while most have no foundation. Dating mainly to the mid-1980s, these include a gable-end garage clad in tongue-and-groove siding with corner boards, and a single, rolling, vehicle bay door; a side-gable-roofed, one-bay shed with T-111 siding; a gable-end garage with T-111 siding and double-leaf doors; a modern gambrel-roofed prefabricated shed; and a gable-end shed with T-111 siding.

The smaller baseball field, located in the southwest portion of the property contains two concrete block dugouts, and a one-story frame concession stand/clubhouse. These resources are modern and non-contributing. Fireman's Field also contains numerous small sets of bleachers, flagpoles, and signage that is too small in size to warrant inclusion in the resource inventory.

**RESOURCE INVENTORY:**

Tabernacle	1 contributing building
2 barbeque pits	2 contributing structures
Picnic pavilion	1 contributing structure
2 baseball fields	2 non-contributing sites
2 bleachers	2 non-contributing objects
2 scoreboards	2 non-contributing objects
Flagpole	1 non-contributing object
Gazebo	1 non-contributing structure
4 dugouts	4 non-contributing structures
3 clubhouses	3 non-contributing buildings
8 sheds/garages	8 non-contributing buildings



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## **8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The Bush Meeting Tabernacle that stands in a wooded area known as Dillon's Woods just south of the main business district in the town of Purcellville, Loudoun County, is significant as a remarkable surviving artifact of social history in Northern Virginia. With its beginnings reaching back to 1878 with the formation of the Prohibition and Evangelical Association of Loudoun County, the present building constructed in 1903 symbolizes an enduring institution that not only recalls the era of prohibition but also the position of the Bush Meeting and its surrounding grounds in the social history of Purcellville. Purportedly the largest single building to accommodate the public in Loudoun County before the construction of Dulles Airport, the Bush Meeting Tabernacle is a contributing resource in the Purcellville Historic District, but is considered sufficiently significant on its own to be nominated individually to the National Register. It is one of only three surviving structures surveyed in the state built to accommodate summertime religious and reform revivals and the only structure identified that was not related solely to a single religious denomination. The monumental, one-story, eight-sided auditorium, built to accommodate up to 3,000 people, is set in a large park-like area and offered optimal public space for public gatherings, speeches, religious revivals, fairs and sporting events for a town that thrived after the arrival of the railroad in the 1870s. The Bush Meeting Tabernacle also became a primary subject for several personal memoirs that provide lively descriptions of activities at the Bush Meeting ground over its history. Notable speakers included William Jennings Bryan and well known evangelist, "Billy" Sunday. Beginning in 1939, following the decline in its use as an evangelical meeting place, it served as a popular public skating rink and community center. The Bush Meeting House and grounds are individually eligible for the National Register on a state level of significance under Criterion A for religion, recreation, and social history and under Criterion C for architecture. Its uniqueness at a state level is substantiated by its scale and configuration and the fact that no other building of this size and function, not directly associated with a single religious denomination, has been identified in Virginia. Criteria consideration A applies to this property since it was originally used for religious purposes, but its functions reached far beyond any religious activities for all of its period of significance. The period of significance is from 1903 with the actual construction of the Tabernacle building to 1960, when it was still in use for recreational purposes.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The Bush Meeting was born in the midst of one of the most enduring social movements in the nation's history. Churches, particularly the Methodist Church, had long sponsored annual "Camp Meetings," where prominent preachers, concerned about the spiritual health of their flocks, visited communities, attracting thousands of attendees. One of the earliest of these gatherings in Loudoun County was held at Benton's Woods, in Unison from 1850 to 1928.<sup>1</sup> There had long been growing concern, particularly among women, that alcohol and spirits were at the heart of many of the problems of American society.

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There was a decline in this concern during the Civil War, but in the decades that followed the war, particularly with growing industrialization and the movement toward a more urban society, energetic prohibition efforts re-emerged on the American scene. The W.C.T.U. (Women's Christian Temperance Union) was founded in Chautauqua, New York, in 1874 with a stated goal of "total abstinence from all things harmful," primarily alcohol.<sup>2</sup> It was only two years later in 1876 that the first Bush Meeting took place "at John Brown's Woods," near the village of Lincoln. Apparently, stakes were driven into the ground, crossbars were installed and bushes put on top to form the roof, hence the name "Bush" meeting. The following year, in August 1877, the summer gathering was advertised for the first time and a "Temperance Picnic" was held at "Purcellville Station, with plenty of good music and plenty to eat for all."<sup>3</sup> It was in this climate that the Prohibition and Evangelical Association (PEA) of Loudoun County, Virginia, was founded in August 1878 with the local paper announcing that "The Good Templars of Loudoun County held a Bush Meeting in Dillon's Woods at Purcellville..." with the group proclaiming that "we shall endeavor to make this a Grand Religious Temperance Demonstration."<sup>4</sup> In their own literature published in 1909, the PEA stated: We claim to hold a most unique place among Assemblies in the United States – a place that is outranked by none other on the continent, where the positive prohibition of the Liquor traffic has been so fearlessly, persistently and eloquently championed for thirty-seven years."<sup>5</sup> The PEA's membership, unlike the W.C.T.U., did not limit its membership solely to women but instead its mission incorporated both sexes. According to a news article from 1922, the first Bush Meeting was held in 1877, organized by a group calling themselves "the Good Templars." The International Order of Good Templars was founded in New York State in the 1850s and the Loudoun group undoubtedly drew on this tradition.<sup>6</sup> This source states the Templars were later re-organized into the PEA.<sup>7</sup> The slight variances in date and the names of the organizing groups are a measure of the skepticism required when evaluating peoples' memories and the newspaper reports.

The Bush Meeting Tabernacle appears to be a unique structure in Virginia in its form, scale, and function. Only two other buildings have been identified that served a comparable function, although the other two resources were solely affiliated with a single religious denomination and did not specifically accommodate reform revivals that were non-denominational in character. The Jonesville Methodist Camp Ground in Southwest Virginia's Lee County, Virginia, [DHR # 052-0007, VLR, 07/17/73; NRHP 05/16/74] is a large, rectilinear frame structure constructed in 1827 as part of the Great Awakening Movement in Virginia. The Kirkland Grove Campground in Northumberland County on Virginia's Northern Neck, [DHR # 066-0089; VLR 12/19/91; NRHP 10/15/92] was exclusively associated with the Baptist denomination. It was constructed in 1892 and was part of the same religious revivalism as the Bush Meeting. Its form was not dissimilar from Bush, but the outside walls were open. There is no indication it was ever used for other denominations or for general community use. All other buildings described as "community centers or meeting places" in the DHR database appear to have been associated with the Masons or with specific churches. None are of the

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scale or multi-sided configuration of the Bush Meeting Tabernacle.<sup>8</sup>

The first gathering place in Purcellville did not have a permanent building but rather assembled under a large tent. The location in Dillon's Woods at the apex of two roads coming from the south was not only convenient to both the townspeople and visitors arriving by train at the local passenger depot, but was also the locus of several churches and a two-room school, suggesting the public and institutional use of the property was not unusual in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>9</sup> A July 28, 1894, newspaper article reported that the "17<sup>th</sup> Annual Gospel, Temperance and Prohibition Meeting of Loudoun County was to be held at Purcellville August 7, 8, and 9 of 1894." The news story goes on to report that the Committee had purchased a 9,000 square foot tent for the assembly. This confirms that the assembly had been held every year since 1878. A daily admission of five cents was charged for entry, and a detailed train schedule included, suggesting that many came to the meetings from some distance.<sup>10</sup> Local news coverage, dated August 11, 1894, reported that a tornado had passed through Loudoun, with "the most fatal and disastrous results wrought on the grounds of the Temperance Bush Meeting at Purcellville where a large number of persons were in the Grove to witness the winding-up of the annual meeting. The catastrophic cyclonic storm apparently caused the newly installed 80- by 120-foot "oval tent"<sup>11</sup> to collapse, and one man was killed by a falling tent pole. Several others were injured.<sup>12</sup>

By 1902, the Bush Meeting had clearly become a popular tradition, with people coming from miles around to enjoy music, food, preaching and "speechifying" by local politicians. It is likely that the "oval" tent shape was the inspiration for the construction of the permanent, octagonal-shaped building constructed by local contractor Arch Simpson in 1903. Simpson was a particularly prolific builder in Loudoun County, having built both the Round Hill Methodist Church in 1887 and the stationhouse in Round Hill in 1902. He also built a number of barns in the primarily agricultural county, indicating he had a lot of experience in large as well as institutional buildings. His own large residence that he built at 8 East Loudoun Street in Round Hill is a measure of his ability to construct both sizable and sophisticated buildings.<sup>13</sup> The Bush Meeting Tabernacle, because of its scale would have called for a skilled and sophisticated builder. Its durability is a testament to Simpson's success.

A news article in the Washington Times on June 11, 1903, provides the best description of the construction of the new building. "The Association is building on the old grounds at Purcellville, a mammoth auditorium 80 X 160 feet, designed by a skilled architect, for comfort and durability, with a seating capacity for at least 3,000 persons, and we think will be the best structure of its kind for a public meeting to be found in an rural center in Virginia," it declared. The size of the Bush Meeting building rivals the Chautauqua Institution Amphitheatre, which still stands.<sup>14</sup> The article goes on to say that the grounds had been leased for a "term of years" and "are being enclosed so as to protect expressly for public meetings, picnics, and other occasions. The situation and equipment of the place will make it a most desirable location for families or parties who may desire to camp out..."

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confirming that the acreage surrounding the Tabernacle building was viewed as part of the property being developed. The news article published a detailed schedule of events that included a "Sunday School Day" and prohibition days with "music and literary entertainment each night." Gospel readings and speeches by W.C.T.U. leaders accompanied by musical presentations completed the programs.<sup>15</sup>

The Bush Meeting in the newly constructed Tabernacle each August was clearly the biggest event in the county, drawing thousands of visitors. Purcellville's location on the Washington and Old Dominion rail line made it particularly convenient to travelers from both east and west. To capture the flavor of the event, several illuminating memoirs of the 1910s recall the annual occasion. The late, prominent local Quaker, Asa Moore Janney, who would have been only 10 in 1918, penned his recollections in 1986, recalling the thrill of the massive two-week gathering.

Every summer Bush Meeting put on about two weeks of uplift: Chautauqua-like meetings, speeches, Christian entertainment. Most days, except two Sundays of course, a gas-engined merry-go-round would be whirling around, filled to capacity down in the woods where the music would not disturb the speakers...the newspapers would report an attendance of three thousand on a good day, giving some idea of the crowds....there were a few small cabins where families could stay the course...So many buggies stood in the woods, their horses hitch four to a tree...Prohibition was a main theme in many a speaker's talk."<sup>16</sup>

Purcellville's Bush Meeting attracted some of the biggest names in the nation when it comes to popular politicians and evangelists. William Jennings Bryan, possibly one of the best known political speakers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, gave his famous "Cross of Gold" speech here in 1913 when he was Secretary of State under Woodrow Wilson. Politicians like Harry Byrd and Westmoreland Davis were frequent orators.<sup>17</sup> Oregon Evangelist Dr. E. J. Bulgin, a particularly popular evangelist who in his early life had been an agnostic and who preached all over the country, visited the Bush Meeting in 1924, offering stirring and powerful speeches to both intimidate and engage the faithful.<sup>18</sup>

In 1906, J. Dalton Dillon, owner of the land known as Dillon's Woods, sold the three acres of Bush Meeting grounds, its tabernacle and its "frame two-story boarding house," to the Prohibition and Evangelical Association for \$2,000. The sale indicates that prior to 1906, and confirmed by the newspaper article from 1903, the property was leased to the PEA.<sup>19</sup>

Over the next decade and a half, more and more political speeches dominated the annual occasion. Following the 1916 prohibition of alcoholic beverages by Virginia, and in 1920 by the federal government, the prohibition activities at the Bush Meeting declined even further. Eugene Scheel, local historian, posits that the Quakers, who in the early years dominated the governance of the Bush Meeting, were primarily Republicans and were not interested in hearing the dominant Democratic Party

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speakers at the Bush Meeting public presentations. In 1917, it appears new management of the Bush Meeting site was called for. A Purcellville community association was formed "supported by public spirited citizens,"<sup>20</sup> and the focus shifted away from preoccupation with temperance issue and religious revivalism and the movement toward popular speakers and Chautauqua-type activities. Chautauquas were primarily non-political.<sup>21</sup>

Newspaper notices in 1918 confirm that the annual Bush Meeting was beginning to diminish. A news piece from July 2, 1918, says "The number of weekdays has been reduced from 7 to 3 because it is felt that there should be less interruption to the business and industries than formerly because of our war necessities."<sup>22</sup> In 1918, a deed was recorded in which owners, J. D. and Mary M. Dillon conveyed to the Loudoun County Community Association a 13-acre parcel of land that adjoined property of the Loudoun County Prohibition and Evangelical Association. It was this land that ultimately was the site of the baseball field.<sup>23</sup> In May 1921, in order to secure a debt, the Loudoun County Community Association, which apparently had by then acquired the smaller parcel with the Tabernacle building, conveyed its three-acre parcel on which the Tabernacle stood to Clarence L. Embey, trustee. This 1921 legal instrument specifically refers to the "Bush Meeting Grounds, whereon the auditorium is erected, including the entire boarding or lodging houses..."<sup>24</sup> A news item from August of the same year indicates that the sponsor of the annual Bush Meeting was by then the Loudoun County Community Association, reflecting a shift away from the temperance and prohibition focus of earlier years. The featured speakers that August were the Honorable Andrew Jackson Montague, the "silver-tongued orator of Virginia," and "His Excellency Westmoreland Davis," recently elected Governor of the Commonwealth.<sup>25</sup> When several of the memoirs are taken into consideration, it appears that the annual August gathering came to be looked upon more as a grand social occasion with musical performances rather than solely dominated either by evangelism or politics. However, as late as August, 1931, Billy Sunday, possibly the best known of the evangelists, preached at the Bush Meeting. His sermon was entitled "Crooks, Corkscrews, Bootleggers, and Whiskey Politicians,"<sup>26</sup> and possibly represented the last hurrah for the Biblical proselytizers at Bush Tabernacle.

In 1919, the Loudoun County Fair had moved to Purcellville from Leesburg, thereby siphoning off those who saw the August gathering at the Tabernacle as less entertaining. The declining economy, ravaged agriculture and declining public interest in issues of prohibition led to the demise of the Bush Meeting in the early 1930s. Loudoun voters by nearly a two-to-one margin supported repeal of Prohibition. Even voters in Purcellville voted for repeal by a slim margin.<sup>27</sup>

A gathering of the Ku Klux Klan at the Tabernacle (by then called the Purcellville Auditorium) took place in May 1928, with speaker J. C. Baskin of Richmond saying little about Klan philosophy but taking the occasion to attack Governor Harry Byrd. Many attendees left the auditorium, since they disagreed bitterly with an attack on the popular Byrd.<sup>28</sup>

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In 1931, Clarence Embey, who had secured the \$4,000 debt for the Loudoun County Community Association on the Bush Meeting property ten years earlier, sold both parcels (the 13-acre parcel and the three acres with the Tabernacle Building) to Clifton M. Warner, following the failure of the Community Association to pay the debt and a public auction of the property. The selling price was \$5,500.<sup>29</sup> The Bush Tabernacle and its grounds, now in private hands, continued to host activities such as the Loudoun 4-H Fair in 1935.<sup>30</sup> According to one source, a "flourishing County Fair was held on the grounds for several years," but ultimately languished as it placed too heavy a burden on the Loudoun County Community Association. That did not succeed, and the Church donated the property to the Purcellville Volunteer Fire Department.<sup>31</sup>

Baseball had been part of the Purcellville scene since the teens.<sup>32</sup> The grounds of the Bush meeting became an important locus of the local baseball team in the late 1940s after the firemen acquired the property. The Purcellville team that played in the Northern Virginia Baseball League was the Loudoun County champion for three years in a row in the 1930s.<sup>33</sup> Memories of African-American baseball players recall, that in the era of strict segregation they did not play at Fireman's Field, but rather at nearby Emancipation Park. It was not until 1951 that a black baseball team from Purcellville played a white baseball team from Front Royal at Fireman's Field.<sup>34</sup> Only two years earlier, electric lights were installed at the Fireman's Field baseball diamond, permitting night time play.

The Bush Meeting grounds continued to be an important public gathering place. In 1939, the Tabernacle structure became a roller-skating rink, a function it continued to fill until the present day. During the 1940s and 50s, the large public building was the site of wrestling matches and musical concerts, including appearances by popular country singer, Patsy Cline of nearby Winchester. In 1944, Clifton M. and Nellie N. Warner sold the Bush Meeting property, consisting of the three-acre and 13-acre parcels to the trustees of the Alexandria District Camp Association of the Methodist Church for \$10,000. A caveat on the deed is that the "said premises shall be used, kept, maintained, and disposed of, as a place of divine worship of the Methodist Ministry...subject to the Discipline..." The deed specifies that the real estate conveyed was "for use as a religious, educational, civil and recreational center under the auspices and supervision of the regularly elected and acting trustees of the Methodist Church in the Alexandria District of the Virginia Conference. The deed also references a wire and board fence surrounding the grounds."<sup>35</sup>

Three years later the Methodist Church sold the Bush Meeting property to the Purcellville Volunteer Fire Department, "a corporation." The selling price was \$13,000, reflecting a \$3,000 profit from the Methodists' purchase in 1944.<sup>36</sup> In a deed dated April 29, 2008, the Purcellville Volunteer Fire Department sold the Tabernacle building and the surrounding grounds for \$1.7 million to the Town of Purcellville.<sup>37</sup> Although its use as a skating rink has temporarily been suspended due to structural

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problems with the tabernacle building, the property continues to serve as the locus for community events including concerts and other public gatherings.

Historical research does not suggest that there are any significant archaeological remains associated with the property.

**ENDNOTES**

<sup>1</sup> "Unison Town History," Unison Preservation Society. (information from the National Park Service description of the Unison community); <http://www.unisonva.org/history.html>.

<sup>2</sup> "Woman's Christian Temperance Union." Home page [www.wctu.org/](http://www.wctu.org/) visited September 2, 2009. "Temperance Movement," Ohio Historical Society; (Ohio History Central). <http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/>.

<sup>3</sup> Eugene M. Scheel. The Story of Purcellville, Loudoun County, Virginia. [sponsored by the First Virginia Bank- First National Bank of Purcellville, Virginia, in celebration of its 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 1902-1977], 10. Loudoun Mirror, May 31, 1877.

<sup>4</sup> Loudoun Mirror, August 1, 1878.

<sup>5</sup> Official Program of the Thirty-Second Annual Temperance and Gospel Meeting of the Prohibition and Evangelical Association of Loudoun County, Virginia," April 3-11, 1909, Purcellville, Va. [Leesburg, VA: Press of the Loudoun Mirror, 1909].

<sup>6</sup> David M. Fahey, "How the Good Templars Began: Fraternal Temperance in New York State." Social History of Alcohol Review, Nos. 38-39 (1999).

<sup>7</sup> "The Thriving Town of Purcellville," Loudoun Times Mirror, ca. 1922 [Leesburg, VA: Thomas Balch Library].

<sup>8</sup> The DHR DSS database was searched on November 4, 2009. See "Jonesville Methodist Camp Ground," [052-0007; "Kirkland Grove Campground," 066-0089].

<sup>9</sup> Asa Moore Janney and Werner Janney. A Medieval Virginia Town, 1914-1919. [Lincoln, VA: 1986] following page 24. This hand-drawn map is based in the memory of then 10-year-old Asa Janney for the period ca. 1914-1918.

<sup>10</sup> "Bush Meeting," Loudoun Times Mirror, July 28, 1894. [Leesburg, VA: Thomas Balch Library].

<sup>11</sup> Leesburg Washingtonian, July 28 and August 11, 1894. Scheel, 10.

<sup>12</sup> "Tornado Passed Through Loudoun," Loudoun Times Mirror, August 11, 1894 [Leesburg, VA: Thomas Balch Library].

<sup>13</sup> Ann Whitehead Thomas. A Story of Round Hill, Loudoun County, Virginia [Leesburg, VA: Friends of the Thomas Balch Library, 2004], 26.

<sup>14</sup> Carolyn Pitts, "Chautauqua Institution Historic District." National Register of Historic Places (New York), 1989.

<sup>15</sup> Washingtonian-Mirror, June 11, 1903.

<sup>16</sup> Asa Moore Janney and Werner Janney. A Medieval Town..., 45-46.

<sup>17</sup> "Historic Walking Tour, Purcellville, Virginia. See <http://www.ppa-va.org>.; Eugene Scheel. "Faithful Came to Valley for Sobering Words." Washington Post, August 6, 2000, V03.

<sup>18</sup> St. Petersburg (Florida) Times, April 25, 1925; Janney, 48-49.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Mary Nichols. "The Big Bush Meetings of 1878-1917..." Loudoun Times Mirror, November 16, 1961.

<sup>21</sup> "Chautauqua Movement: A movement in American adult education started in 1874 at Chautauqua, New York, where an expanded summer Sunday school offered courses in science and the humanities. After 1900, traveling 'chautauquas' presented summertime lectures entertainment under large tents." The Difference Dictionary,"



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<http://www.sff.net/people/Gunn/dd/c.htm> visited September 9, 2009. Chautauquas often were spiritual in nature, but their primary focus was on carrying culture and cultural programs to rural areas.

<sup>22</sup> Loudoun Mirror, July 2, 1918.

<sup>23</sup> Loudoun County Deed Book 9-M/ 271 (1918, recorded 1919).

<sup>24</sup> Loudoun County Deed Book 9-M/ 272 (1921).

<sup>25</sup> Loudoun Mirror, August 8, 1918.

<sup>26</sup> Scheel, "Faithful Came to Valley....,"

<sup>27</sup> Loudoun Times Mirror, October 5, 1933.

<sup>28</sup> Loudoun Herald, May 31, 1928.

<sup>29</sup> Loudoun County Deed Book 10-Q/ 464 (1931).

<sup>30</sup> Scheel, The Story of Purcellville....

<sup>31</sup> Mary Nichols, "The Big Bush Meetings..."

<sup>32</sup> Janney, 50.

<sup>33</sup> Loudoun Times Mirror. "Out of the Attic," March 24, 19183.

<sup>34</sup> Deborah A. Lee. Purcellville, Virginia, 1908-2008: A Centennial Anthology. [Town of Purcellville, 2008], 69-71.

<sup>35</sup> Loudoun County Deed Book 11-X/244 (1944).

<sup>36</sup> Loudoun County Deed Book 12-M/226. (1947).

<sup>37</sup> Loudoun County Deed recorded April 29, 2008; Legal Description: 200805010026432. Loudoun County Real Estate Tax, Assessment, and Parcel Database (2009). Parcel ID 488275623.



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**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

**UTM REFERENCES (NAD 83):**

A: 18 265229E 4335209N  
B: 18 265407E 4335165N  
C: 18 265423E 4334904N  
D: 18 265279E 4334899N  
E: 18 265146E 4335079N

**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:**

The nominated boundaries include the land currently associated with the Tabernacle and Fireman's Field as shown on the Town of Purcellville Tax Parcel: 488-27-5623.

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION:**

The boundaries of nominated property include the entire parcel historically associated with the Tabernacle and Fireman's Field and held by the current owners. This being the same parcel recorded on April 29, 2008 in Loudoun County Deed Book M12, page 226.

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**PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION:**

Unless otherwise noted, all photographs are of:

Property: **The Tabernacle/Fireman's Field**

VDHR File Number: **286-5001-0234; 286-5007**

Location: **Purcellville, Virginia**

Date of photograph: **March 2009**

Photographer: **Maral S. Kalbian**

Negatives filed at: **Virginia Department of Historic Resources in Richmond, Virginia.**

Photo 1 of 11

View: Tabernacle, northwest view.

Negative no. 24762 [17]

Photo 2 of 11

View: Tabernacle, northeast view.

Negative no. 24761 [16]

Photo 3 of 11

View: Tabernacle, east view.

Negative no. 24761 [15]

Photo 4 of 11

View: Tabernacle, interior view looking toward stage (south).

Negative no. 24761 [22]

Photo 5 of 11

View: Tabernacle, interior view looking toward concession counter (north).

Negative no. 24761 [32]

Photo 6 of 11

View: Tabernacle, interior view detail interior post.

Negative no. 24761 [34]

Photo 7 of 11

View: Dillon's Woods, view looking west toward Tabernacle

Negative no. 24761 [14]

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1  
que pits, northwest view.  
. 24761 [9]

1  
c pavilion, north view.  
. 24761 [10]

11  
ern concession stand/clubhouse, southwest view.  
. 24762 [20]

f 11  
ge baseball field, bleachers, dugout, and clubhouse; southwest view.  
o. 24762 [35]

